The GIRL and the GAME

A Story of Mountain Railroad Life

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SYNOPSIS.

Little Helen Holmes, daughter of General Holmes, railroad man, is rescued from imminent danger on a scenic railroad, by George Storm, a newsboy. Grown to young womanhood Helen makes a spectacular double rescue of Storm, now a freight fireman, and of her father and his friends, Amos Rhinelander, financier, and Robert Seagrue, promoter, from a threatened collision between a passenger train and a runaway freight.

CHAPTER II.

A fight among the directors—and a bitter fight—had been indicated from the moment the allotment of the stock issue of the new Copper Range and Tidewater cut-off line was discussed. It was not alone that the territory of the proposed cut-off was rich in traffic. The survey made by Holmes' engineers through a wild country, hitherto reputed inaccessible, had developed a low-grade pass through the Superstition mountains that would put the Tidewater's active rival—the Colorado and Coast line—with its heavy grades and curves, at a serious, if not irretrievable, disadvantage, in its fight for competitive traffic.

General Holmes, seated in the library of his country home with his associate, Amos Rhinelander, took from his morning mail a letter from John B. Rhodes, chairman of his executive committee, which revealed the extent of the feeling over the situation. Holmes handed the letter to Rhinelander. Rhodes had discovered that their competitors already had a surveying party out on reconnoisance, endeavoring to locate the Tidewater pass; having in view the reputation for sharp practice of the Colorado line backers, he urged Holmes to keep a close watch on the original survey, now in the general's possession, until the right of way should be definitely secured. He added that with his party of the directors, he would arrive on a special at noon for the informal board meeting at which means for financing the project were to be arranged.

Through a complication in financial arrangements, Holmes had been obliged to put on his own, the Tidewater line board, a minority group of directors led by Rhinelander's nephew, Seagrue and Seagrue's attorney, Capelle—Seagrue was owner of a substantial interest in the Colorado and Coast line itself. Indeed, his means were all tied up in it. It was this complication which caused uneasiness in Holmes' mind and called for prudence—not all those even of his own directorate could be trusted, in the circumstances, not to connive against his interest.

Seagrue had already been for the week-end the house guest of Holmes. He was at that moment seated in the garden with Helen—Holmes' daughter—and Helen was being alternately amused and bored by the patently forced efforts of the easterner to interest her in himself and his affairs. More than once during his stay she had refused to listen seriously to him and now to annoy him, she professed to wonder, as the blast of a freight engine whistle sounded at the moment through the hills, whether that might not be George Storm, one of her father's many engineers—a man to whom she had lately rendered a great and gratuitous service and about whom Seagrue himself had once tried to twit her. And it so chanced that it really was young Storm's train running by them for the passing track. He had orders to wait there for the directors' special.

Toward noon, Holmes and his guests, together with Helen, started for the station to meet the train. Its arrival was the occasion of many greetings for Helen from old New York friends who declared that the mountain sun and air had wrought wonders for the once delicate girl.

It was while she stood thus on the platform surrounded by her newly arrived guests that a young engineman crossed the platform, cap in hand. After a slight hesitation he walked up to her as if he would speak. Again, as if undecided, he halted just before Helen. She noticed the rather grimy appearance of the stalwart engineman, obviously just from his cab, but did not look closely enough to recognize him. If he was pausing, as he stood, for courage, it rose in him, for as her eyes returned to him, he stepped nearer to her: "I think it was you who saved my life the other day," he said somewhat haltingly. Then he questioningly held out his hand. "Will you accept my thanks?"

The moment he spoke, Helen knew him—it was Storm, the fireman of the freight wreck. Indeed, she remembered him almost too well. Her face flushed with embarrassment. Her guests, without catching what he had said, were critically inspecting the smoked engineer. Something like a wave of resentment swept over Helen. Why should he choose this, of all moments, to speak to her? She was quite innocent of false pride; but her friends could not possibly understand the situation and Storm with real western impulsiveness had chosen, it seemed, the most inopportune time possible to express his gratitude.

But there was his outstretched hand—should she ignore it? Anger swayed her—yet something within her, and something in Storm's eyes and his manner, pleaded against cutting him dead. With furiously red cheeks but sweeping aside the cost, Helen put out her hand. "It was nothing," she said quickly. "Do not think of it." Then she repaid Storm's impulsive stupidity, as she thought it deserved, by catching at something Seagrue was saying and failing to see Storm again. The engineer had come up prepared really to say how grateful he was; he found himself, in a fleeting second, already well launched on the social toboggan and shooting toward the bottom of a long hill. Seagrue, almost before Storm's back was turned, was laughing at Helen and pointing to her glove. The white, soft kid now bore beyond repair the heavy, black fingerprints of the engineman's hand.

Questions and banterings from her companions contributed nothing toward restoring Helen's composure. But as the group moved to the waiting motor cars, she unostentatiously drew the offending glove over her wrist and threw it away. One pair of eyes watched the action closely; Storm, collecting his wits after his social disaster, noted what she had done. He was too philosophical to resent it. Instead, crossing the platform, when the party had driven away, he picked up the discarded glove and put it in his pocket.

Nor did he, in his turn, escape unseen. As one of the cars whirled around a nearby corner Helen, looking back at the scene of her annoyance, saw Storm picking up something white; she knew it was her glove.

On reaching home—where the ladies were taken to their various rooms and the men went to their business—Helen, from her own room overlooking the passing track, watched the freight, bearing Storm, draw out and stop before the station for orders.

Turning to her glass more than once to see whether her cheeks were still as flushed as they felt, she was gratified to find that traces of her humiliation had disappeared. Her mind from which she had tried to dismiss the whole incident, was now assailed by a rebellious curiosity concerning what she had seen happen on the distant platform when Storm crossed it to pick up her glove. As his frank eyes returned again and again to her imagination, something seemed to call her strongly, back to where he still was detained. She resisted longer; then surrendering to a sudden impulse, she ran downstairs, while her guests were disposing themselves, stepped into her racing car, drove to the station and alighting just as Storm came out of the telegraph office, she herself began to search at the edge of the platform for something. The engineer, after an interval, deliberately joined her.

"You have lost something."

Helen glanced up with affected surprise. "Nothing of moment. I missed a ring when I got home," she fabricated lightly, "and one of my gloves. I thought I might have dropped the one with the other here."

Storm's hand moved toward his blouse, then regaining his composure, he withdrew his hand, empty, and affected to search along the roadway with her. It was a brief duel of wits, but one in which the railroad man was no longer at a disadvantage. He was quite willing to search as long as she would linger and Helen, more than a little interested, was capricious and did linger until Storm's slow sentences began once more to bear too directly on the episode of the wreck and his gratefulness; then with a hasty good-by she started for home and Storm, climbing into his engine, pulled out with his long train.

General Holmes, in the meantime, with his two jealous groups of directors, was striving in his drawing room to arrive with them at a mutually satisfactory settlement of the proposed stock issue. In reserving 30,000 shares of this for himself and his friends, Holmes had allotted 20,000 to Seagrue and his Wall street associates. This both Seagrue and Capelle had bluntly refused to accept, since the proposed line would work havoc with the through and local traffic of the Colorado and Coast road. Seagrue demanded instead an equal distribution of the new stock. Holmes and Rhinelander, after a long conference, put the motion flatly to the eleven directors. Seven of them supported President Holmes' proposal.

Seagrue, white with anger, rose. "Cancel our allotment, then. We will fight."

"Tut, tut, Earl," protested Rhinelander. "That's no way to talk."

"We will fight," echoed Capelle, equally wrought up. "Seagrue is right. If we are to be treated in this way we'll parallel your tracks!"

Rhinelander, Holmes and their associates tried in vain to pacify the two; their efforts were useless. Hard words passed and more threats were uttered; the meeting broke up in disorder.

Seagrue and Capelle retired to an adjoining room. Helen passed before them down the hall. Capelle glanced at her and looked toward Seagrue. His face stretched into one of his hollow grins.

"Bad business for you, Seagrue," he said to his companion. "If you can't unload your Colorado and Coast holdings, this thing will put you pretty near out of the game."

"Unload," snorted Seagrue, wrathfully. "When that cut-off is announced Colorado stock won't sell for waste paper."

Helen repassed the hall. Capelle nodded toward her. "There's your best bet, Seagrue. Holmes would give his son-in-law anything."

Seagrue looked glum. He hinted he had already tried that out, and fruitlessly, but spurred by his friend's suggestion, he determined on a further effort. After luncheon he attempted to renew his addresses.

But there seemed about the self-willed girl a certain barrier of independence, which, try as he would, he could never penetrate. "What's the matter, Helen?" he demanded at last. "You seem to take everything I say as a joke."

She repressed a little bubble of laughter. "That's the spirit it's meant in, isn't it?"

He was too irritated to be patient. Toward evening he assayed to be serious again; again she lightly evaded his advances.

Late in the day, when walking past the doors of the library, he saw Holmes, finishing a conference with Rhinelander, once more roll up an important document and place it within his safe, set inside the library wall. Seagrue knew too well what it was—the survey of the cut-off, the building of which, by crippling him financially, was likely to wreck his hopes of a career.

It was in this sullen mood that Capelle, a few moments later, encountered him. They had been partners in more than one unscrupulous enterprise and had learned to set value on audacity. A guarded discussion followed. Seagrue moodily rejected one after another of the suggestions of the resourceful Capelle, until one startled him into anger. He balked incontinently. "I won't stand for safe blowing," he muttered.

"Nothing of the kind suggested," returned Capelle, undaunted. And with the whining smile that marked his face in argument, he continued: "I'll have two good men here by 11:30 tonight, if you say the word. One of them can open a safe by the mere click of the tumblers. All we want out of it is a copy of the cut-off survey. If we can get hold of that we can get hold of their right of way—most of it must come from Washington—before Holmes knows what's going on. I'll make the copy of their survey myself and return the original to the safe before morning with no one a bit the wiser. Why, see here! You're staying right in the house. All you have to do is to let them in tonight. Are you game? Or are you a whipped dog right now?"

Seagrue listened with set face. The low-toned conference lasted longer. At its close the two separated. Shortly afterward, Capelle, in Seagrue's motor car, started rapidly for the city.

At nearly twelve o'clock that night—some time after the house was quiet—Seagrue, leaving his room, went down to the library. He unlocked the terrace doors. Capelle's men were outside. They entered and Seagrue led them before the safe. The criminal expert of the pair made hardly more than a pretense of dropping the tumblers for an opening. He had come prepared for any eventuality, and the moment he saw the mechanism of the lock was unassailable he directed his companion, Hyde, to connect up the drills; his orders from Capelle were to open the safe.

Upstairs, Helen, in slumber, was half-awakened by a whistle signal. Storm was bringing a freight train down the hill to wait for the midnight flyer. The rumble of passing trains rarely disturbed her. This night a much lighter but an unusual sound woke her completely. She sat up a moment, listening. It seemed close—someone was in the house. Turning on a light and dressing hastily, Helen opened the hall door of her room.

She had been careful not to make the slightest noise in her movements. Unfortunately the light behind her silhouetted her figure on the floor at the foot of the broad flight of stairs Spike, keen-eyed, in the library, saw it. He touched Hyde. "Douse it!" he muttered. Hoyde extinguished the light. The two paused, listened, walked into the hall and paused again. Then they started noiselessly up the stairs.

Guarded as they had been, Helen felt their presence. With fast-beating heart she ran to her window. Out in the night she could see the light of a torch. It was Storm's light, carried as he worked around his engine. Catching up a small serving bell she ran out on her balcony and tying the bell to the telephone wire that connected with the main line wires, she started the jingling messenger off for help.

The engineman, busy with his work, presently heard the slight jingle, but only to wonder for a moment what it could be. The two criminals had entered Helen's room. The instant she stepped in from the balcony they caught and overpowered her—stifled her screams, and in spite of her continuing struggles, rudely gagged her.

The bell again attracted Storm's attention, and he was puzzled to determine what it might mean. Looking toward's Helen's home he saw a bright light in one of the upper windows. Then, of a sudden, he saw more—silhouetted against the pane, a woman and a man were struggling. He alarmed the crew and ran swiftly up the hill for General Holmes' house.

In the interval, leaving Helen helpless, the safe-blowers descended the stairs. Holmes and Rhinelander had likewise been awakened by the muffled sounds of the struggle and the two appeared in the upper hall. Seagrue joined them and with his uncle hurried into Helen's room, where she was trying to release herself. But her father, turning downstairs, had interrupted the two safe-blowers at the very library door. The old soldier was no match for the two men, but he tackled them together. He had hardly begun to fight when he was struck down by a black-jack and the two thugs, survey in hand, made their escape. They crossed the lawn, gained the shrubbery close to the gate, and in the distance saw the headlight of the midnight passenger train. Signal was not one of its stops, but the safe-blowers ran hard for the station and taking a long chance for their getaway they recklessly but safely boarded the running train as it slowed somewhat for the bridge.

Thus Perished the First Man Who Discovered the First Railroad Pass Over the Continental Divide.

In the confusion within the household Helen had been released. She had hysterically told her story and as she and her friends rushed downstairs she encountered Storm, who had helped her dazed father to a chair. "Are you hurt, daddy?" asked his daughter anxiously.

"No," he cried, "and I've given one of them a jolt he'll remember. But Helen!"—in his agitation he laid his hand heavily on his daughter's shoulder—"those damned scoundrels have got our survey!"

"Then they shall never get off with it," exclaimed Helen with flashing eyes. "We will catch them if it kills somebody."

She gave her orders right and left—for caring for her father, calling the police and for making the pursuit.

The boarding of the moving passenger train by the two men had not escaped Storm's eyes, and a few words with Helen were enough to clear things. The flyer was gone and the burglars with it, but there was a chance yet to get them. Hastening with Storm down the hill, Helen told him the whole story. When the two reached the siding Storm asked the conductor to put out a flagman to protect the freight; he half lifted and half pushed Helen up into the cab, and the instant the fireman cut off the engine, started in pursuit of the fast-receding passenger train.

But the stern chase is the long chase. The freight engineer had set himself a difficult task; one thing alone was in his favor, everything else was against him. He was running a light engine against one pulling a strong string of sleeping cars. But his own machine was built for traction, not for speed, and he was pitting it against one of the fastest types of engines on the division. From the time Storm opened the throttle not a device was left untried to make his ponderous engine go fast; not a trick of all those that had already made his reputation as an exceptional runner was now overlooked and every resource of the engineer's art was brought into play to overhaul the flying passenger train.

Helen crouched on the fireman's box with her eyes straining ahead into the darkness, or glancing across the hooded lights of the cab at the profile of the silent engineer, waited in vain for him to look toward her. It seemed as if he had forgotten her existence. His attention, for the moment, was centered on nothing but the terrific headway he had attained and must maintain to win, and his reeling, thundering machine seemed awake to the relentless energy of its driver, was responding like a thing alive to his iron will. A cry from Storm made her look across toward him. She saw his eyes regarding her, but he was pointing silently ahead, and looking again through her own window, Helen's straining vision caught far ahead the faint gleam of the red tail-lights.

From the top of the distant sleeping cars Spike and Hyde had seen the threatening chase. Without a qualm, and crawling along the swaying cars, they made their way toward the engine. They held up the engineer and fireman. Spike understood enough of an engine to take the throttle and he tried to run away from Storm; but this proved a game in which he had no advantage. Striving desperately to increase his speed he found himself, as he glanced back from the cab window, steadily losing ground. The race was now more like the effort of a plow horse to run away from a thoroughbred. A last resort remained for the criminals. Hyde, at Spike's direction, climbed back over the tender and cut off the coaches. The engine pulled away from the train. The air went on and the string of sleepers stopped abruptly. Close behind them the freight engine was pounding and lurching. Storm had barely time to apply his air and pull up as he stopped and he was nearly into the hind-end of the observation car.

When the passenger crew got outside there were hurried explanations. Storm, knowing every foot of the line, saw that they had reached the longest passing track on the division and that by running around the stalled train he still had a chance to overtake his quarry. Throwing his engine into reverse he backed down, took the passing-track switch and tore past the standing cars after the fast disappearing passenger train. With all of its lights extinguished, and still maintaining terrific speed, it was at a hopeless disadvantage against the skill of the man at the throttle of the engine behind.

Overhauled and with defeat in sight as the nose of the huge freight engine crowded them, Hyde from the gangway and Spike, turning from the useless throttle, opened fire with their pistols on their pursuers. Hyde, firing his last shot without effect, in his rage, hurled his heavy gun back at the other cab. It crashed through the window where Helen had sat an instant before, but she was now up and back over the engine tank. As Storm drew steadily abreast of the runaway, she watched her chance and with reckless daring sprang from where she stood over to the tank of the passenger engine. The safe-blowers turned to meet her. Stack and stack the engines were rushing toward the little San Pablo bridge. But with Spike's and Hyde's attention turned from the passive engineer and fireman in the cab, they were suddenly attacked by both from behind. A furious mixup followed. Hyde, as Helen jumped down at him, grappled with her. Storm, eager in the jumping gangway opposite them, saw her peril. Catching up a wrench he hurled it with all his force at Hyde's head; it flew true and the thug sank under the heavy blow like a bullock. Spike in the interval, tearing loose from his assailants, gained the footplate and leaping up on the coal defied them.

It was for no more than a moment; the engineer went pluckily after him. Cornered, Spike looked ahead. They were reaching the river and the engines were making a dizzy speed. With the recklessness of a madman the criminal leaped from the tender far out into the stream below. The slightest miscalculation—a mistake of a tenth of a second in his reckoning—would have cost him his life. Yet he made his jump without injury, struck out for shore and gained the river bank.

Escape was first in his thoughts. He remembered the stolen survey in his pocket. On the safety of this, his money from Capelle depended and his first act was to secrete it near where he landed.

The two engines in this time had been brought to a stop and backed to the bridge. "Get after the man that jumped," cried Helen. "We must find him. Take both banks of the river."

With one of the firemen left to guard Hyde, Storm and the other fireman hurried down one river bank as the passenger engineer took the other. Neither side afforded more than a slight chance of concealment and Spike, starting from where he had cached his stolen document, was pounced on by Storm's fireman. But Spike, a powerful man, had almost fought out for himself a second chance for escape when Storm bore him down to the earth. Helen ran up. "Where's what you have stolen?" she cried furiously as Spike stood prisoner. Storm,

She Ran Out on the Balcony.

without loss of time, searched him. "You've stolen our survey," exclaimed Helen wrathfully. "Where is it?"

Spike shrugged his shoulers. "I don't know what you're talking about," he muttered. "What do you fellows want with me, anyway?" he demanded, looking from one to the other of the two men, impudently.

They dragged him to the freight engine and with Storm directing, both engines started back to the passenger train. The freight engine sounded a greeting to the crew of the stranded flyer, and Storm and Helen clattered past to their own deserted train. With Storm speeding up at his throttle Helen soon saw the semaphore of Signal station and with the two prisoners, Storm and his fireman returned with Helen to the house.

Police officers were already in charge and the safe-blowers were turned over to them. Helen, agitated and anxious, was met at the door of the library by Amos Rhinelander. His face was grave. With a keen, questioning look her father's friend laid his hand tenderly on her arm as she attempted to enter the room. "Stop, Helen," he said in a constrained tone. "Don't go in there just now."

Storm stood near. She would have pushed past Rhinelander, but again he opposed her entrance. "And where is father?" she exclaimed as if a sudden realization had come upon her.

"My child," Rhinelander took her within his arm, "we are under the orders of the police. Nothing in the library must be disturbed."

An awful suspicion gripped her heart. "Father," she exclaimed intensely. "He was hurt. Where is he?"

Rhinelander, avoiding her glance directed into the half-darkened room motioned significantly to Storm. The engineer understood; but it was too late. Slipping with the strength and speed of a fawn from between the two men, Helen darted into the library. Those of the fated household heard in the night an agonizing cry; it rang far. She had found her father all too soon and had thrown herself beside his dead body, where it had been placed on the couch beside the fireplace.

Thus perished by the hand of a wretched criminal—a mere fleck of the scum of our civilization—this man who had himself, and alone, discovered the first railroad pass over the Continental Divide.

Seagrue's ears echoed long with a memory of that cry. Standing beside his captured confederates he asked himself whether the price had not, after all, been too high.

But Spike, insensible to all but his criminal instincts, drew close beside him and asked him, unobserved, for a pencil. But for the fear that his own neck might be jeoparded by an exposure, Seagrue would have had done with his two murderous tools then and there, but he had put himself in their power and dare not refuse. Spike, despite his handcuffed wrists, managed to scribble a note on Seagrue's cuff, telling him where the survey had been hidden. The officers coming out of the library, marched their prisoners away.

Alone in his room, the half-sickened conspirator read Spike's message. He paused and for a long moment pondered his situation. It was not hard for him to shake from his conscience his own responsibility for the tragic outcome of his villainy and Capelle's. It was, he argued, not what he had contemplated or desired. It was Capelle's fault. Accidents will happen—sometimes fatal ones. The game might still be his.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)